

Message Text

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ACTION PM-05

INFO OCT-01 EA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00
SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 DOE-15 ACDA-12 INR-10 L-03
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O R 150816Z MAY 78

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3267

INFO CINCPAC HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE

DEFCON AGENCY WASHDC IMMEDIATE

NAVCOMSTA HAROLD E HOLT IMMEDIATE

SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

AMCONSUL BRISBANE

AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

AMCONSUL PERTH

AMCONSUL SYDNEY

AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 CANBERRA 3730

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - T E X T (P A R A 5 .)

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, AS

SUBJECT: SATELLITE GROUND TERMINAL AT NORTH WEST CAPE

REF: CANBERRA 3694 (DTG: 130248Z MAY 78)

1. SUMMARY: THE MAY 8 ARTICLE IN AUSTRALIA'S "FINANCIAL
REVIEW" BY BRIAN TOOHEY, GARBLING BITS AND PIECES ABOUT
THE SATELLITE GROUND TERMINAL AT NORTH WEST CAPE, HAS BEEN
BOILING BRISKLY ALL WEEK IN PARLIAMENT WITH EMBARRASSING
QUESTIONS ABOUT THE US-AUSTRALIAN RELATIONSHIP BEING ASKED
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IN THE PROCESS. THIS MATTER HAS NOW ESCALATED TO THE POINT
THAT OPPOSITION POLITICIANS HAVE CALLED INTO QUESTION THE
BASIC "GOOD FAITH" OF THE US AND WHETHER OR NOT IT LEVELED
WITH THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT ABOUT SOME SINISTER NEW PURPOSE
TO WHICH IT PLANNED TO PUT THE JOINT US-AUSTRALIAN NAVAL
COMMUNICATIONS STATION AT NORTH WEST CAPE. END SUMMARY.

2. BRIAN TOOHEY'S COLUMN IN LAST MONDAY'S "FINANCIAL REVIEW" BEGAN: "CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS IN THE U.S. REVEALED THAT A GROUND STATION IS BEING BUILT IN AUSTRALIA AS PART OF A NEW DEFENSE SATELLITE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM. BUT NEITHER PARLIAMENT NOR THE PUBLIC HAS BEEN TOLD THAT AUSTRALIA IS TO PLAY HOST TO ANOTHER US MILITARY INSTALLATION." TOOHEY NOTED THAT "EVIDENCE GIVEN IN SUPPORT OF THE USDOD BUDGET INDICATED CONTRACTS HAD BEEN LET FOR A GROUND STATION TO BE BUILT BY PHILCO-FORD AND TRW, MAIN CONTRACTORS AT THE TOP SECRET PINE GAP INSTALLATION." TOOHEY'S ARTICLE WENT ON TO BLEND FACT WITH SPECULATION ABOUT THE SECRET PURPOSES OF THE ALLEGED NEW GROUND SATELLITE TERMINAL AT NORTH WEST CAPE.

3. THE NEXT DAY, AN OPPOSITION SENATOR (JOHN BUTTON) RAISED THE MATTER IN PARLIAMENT, INQUIRING WHETHER THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN INFORMED ABOUT THE PROPOSAL. THE GOA'S INITIAL REPLY, GIVEN BY SENATOR WITHERS, ACTING ON A DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE-PREPARED BRIEF, CONFUSED THE SOLAR OBSERVATORY BEING BUILT AT EXMOUTH WITH THE NORTH WEST CAPE JOINT NAVAL COMMUNICATIONS STATION, AND DENIED THAT THERE WAS ANY CONNECTION BETWEEN THE SOLAR OBSERVATORY AND THE ALLEGED SATELLITE GROUND TERMINAL. AFTER FURTHER NEW REPORTS CLARIFIED THAT THE SOLAR OBSERVATORY WAS NOT IN QUESTION, SENATOR WITHERS PUBLICLY APOLOGIZED, AND AUSTRALIAN DEFENSE MINISTER

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KILLEN .

4. KILLEN'S FIRST STATEMENT, REPEATED IN PARA 3 REFTTEL, GAVE THE PERFECT REPLY: "IN 1973, A SATELLITE TERMINAL AT THE STATION (NAVAL COMMUNICATIONS STATION HAROLD E. HOLT) WAS REMOVED. PURSUANT TO APPROVAL GIVEN BY THE GOVERNMENT IN OCTOBER 1977, IT WAS REPLACED. I HAVE BEEN INFORMED INFORMALLY -- I EMPHASIZE 'INFORMALLY' -- THAT THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT STANDS IN CONTEMPLATION OF PLACING BEFORE THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT A PROPOSAL TO UPDATE THAT SATELLITE TERMINAL. THAT PROPOSAL RELATES TO THE PERIOD 1980 TO 1981. I ASSURE THE HONRABLE GENTLEMAN AND THE HOUSE THAT WHEN A FORMAL PROPOSAL HAS BEEN RECEIVED BY THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT IT WILL BE CONSIDERED ON ITS MERITS."

5. THE OPPOSITION, HOWEVER, DID NOT LET THE MATTER DROP, AND HAS CONTINUED TO IMPLY THAT THE US "LEFT AUSTRALIA IN THE DARK" ABOUT PLANS FOR A NEW DEFENSE SATELLITE COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM. OPPOSITION LEADER BILL HAYDEN WAS ASKED POINT BLANK ON "AM RADIO" THIS MORNING (MAY 15) WHETHER HE BELIEVED THE US WAS DELIBERATELY WITHHOLDING

INFORMATION FROM THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT. HAYDEN
REPLIED: "AT THE VERY LEAST, WHAT I AM SUGGESTING
IS THAT THE US HAS DECIDED UNILATERALLY TO TAKE CERTAIN
ACTIONS AND HASN'T CONSULTED WITH THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT."
ASKED WHY HE THOUGHT THE US GOVERNMENT WOULD DO SUCH A
THING, HAYDEN REPLIED: "PERHAPS IT WAS AN OVERSIGHT."
ASKED WHETHER HE BELIVED IT SPELLED A BREAKDOWN IN
AMERICAN CONFIDENCE IN AUSTRALIA, HAYDEN REPLIED "
DON'T BELIEVE IT WAS THAT QUITE SO MUCH AS SIMPLY TAKING
THIS COUNTRY FOR GRANTED, WHICH I FIND EVEN LESS ACCEPTABLE.
WE ARE VERY GOOD FRIENDS OF THE USA AND WE ARE A VERY
RELIABLE ALLY. BUT THIS SORT OF ACTION, TAKEN UNILATERALLY,
WITHOUT ANY CONSULTATION WITH THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT,
PLACES AN UNREASONABLE AND UNDESIRABLE STRAIN ON THAT
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RELATIONSHIP."

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6. "AM RADIO" (AN EARLY MORNING NEWS/INTERVIEWS/TALK PROGRAM ON THE AUSTRALIAN STATE-CONTROLLED BROADCASTING SYSTEM) THEN PUT SIMILAR QUESTIONS TO DEFENSE MINISTER KILLEN. KILLEN, WHEN ASKED WHETHER THE US HAD TREATED AUSTRALIA WITHOUT PROPER COURTESY, REPLIED: "WELL, THE US HAS LET CONTRACTS FOR A NUMBER OF SATELLITE TERMINALS, AND PRESUMABLY THAT INCLUDES ONE RELATING TO NORTH WEST CAPE. BUT I SEEK TO MAKE IT PERFECTLY CLEAR THAT NO FORMAL PROPOSAL HAS BEEN PLACED BEFORE US, AND, IN A SENSE, THE USG IS PRESUMING. NOW THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S ATTITUDE IS NOT TO BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED. IT WILL NOT BE TAKEN FOR GRANTED." PRESSED ABOUT THE NEED FOR MORE THAN "INFORMAL" CONSULTATION, KILLEN WENT ON TO SAY: "DEFENSE OFFICIALS IN WASHINGTON HAVE BEEN AWARE OF PROPOSALS. I SUPPOSE ONE COULD DRAW THE CONFIDENTIAL

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ANALOGY BY SAYING THAT AN APPLICATION FOR A PERMIT TO BUILD HAS NOT BEEN PUT BEFORE A BUILDING AUTHORITY, BUT NEVERTHELESS THE APPLICANT HAS GONE ABOUT LETTING SUB-CONTRACTS RELATING TO FURNISHING, CONCRETING, AND WHAT HAVE YOU. NOW THIS IS NOT A VERY PLEASANT WAY OF DOING BUSINESS, AND I DON'T DISGUISE MY SENSE OF REGRET THAT THE US GOVERNMENT HAS BEHAVED IN THIS FASHION."

7. IN VARIOUS CONVERSATIONS AT THE FOREIGN OFFICE DURING THE COURSE OF THE DAY, EMBASSY HAS SOUGHT TO CORRECT THE RECORD BY MAKING AVAILABLE BACKGROUND INFORMATION CONTAINED IN REFTEL. FURTHER TO THAT, LGEN PASCHALL'S MESSAGE (DCA 122015Z MAY 78 - NOTAL) WAS VERY WELCOME AND CONTAINED ADDITIONAL USEFUL INFORMATION. WE HAVE CHOSEN TO USE THE ANALOGY OF AN OPERATIONAL DECISION TO REPLACE MANUAL TYPEWRITERS WITH ELECTRIC TYPEWRITERS, SAYING WE WERE NOT OF THE IMPRESSION THAT SUCH AN OPERATIONAL WORKING LEVEL CONSIDERATION REQUIRED GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT CONSULTATIONS OR PRIOR AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT CONCURRENCE. WE HAVE HOMED IN ON THE FACT THAT THE PROPOSED MSG-61 SYSTEM ADDS NO NEW CAPABILITIES OR FUNCTIONS TO THE PURPOSES OF THE JOINT NAVAL COMMUNICATIONS STATION, BUT RATHER IS SIMPLY A GENERATIONAL STEP FORWARD IN REPLACING OBSOLESCEMENT EQUIPMENT CURRENTLY IN USE WITH MORE MODERN STATE-OF-THE-ART EQUIPMENT.

8. COMMENT: IF NOTHING ELSE, THIS BUSH-LEAGUE TEMPEST ILLUSTRATES A FUNDAMENTAL WEAKNESS IN THE WESTMINISTER PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM; THAT AN OPPOSITION MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT CAN GET UP AND ASK A GOVERNMENT MINISTER ABOUT A DECISION TO REPLACE HAND STAPLERS WITH MECHANICAL STAPLERS AND - BINGO - THE QUESTION OF "STAPLERS" IS

RAISED TO THE MINISTERIAL LEVEL. IF EFFECT, A RATHER
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SIMPLE MATTER ABOUT TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT HAS SUDDENLY
BEEN RAIDED, LARGELY, WE SUSPECT, DUE TO THE PAUCITY
OF OTHER NEWS NOW THAT VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE AND
MR. AND MRS. CHIP CARTER HAVE LEFT -- TO A LEVEL ALL OUT
OF PROPORTION TO ITS MERITS. EMBASSY GATHERS THAT PM
FRASER HIMSELF HAS NOW ASKED FOR A JOINT SUBMISSION BY
FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENSE AND CABINET DEPARTMENTS. EMBASSY
COLLABORATED WITH FOREIGN AFFAIRS IN PREPARING THEIR OWN
MINISTERIALSUBMISSION. IF THE PM NOW SQUELCHES THE
MATTER WE WILL LET IT DROP. IF, ON THE OTHER HAND,
DEFENSE MINISTER KILLEN'S ALLEGATION THAT THE US WAS LESS
THAN CANDID IN ITS DEALINGS WITH THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT
CONTINUES AS A MAJOR SOURCE OF COMMENT IN THE PRESS, WE
WOULD LIKE TO BE ABLE TO CONSIDER SENDING A BRIEF PERSONAL
NOTE FROM THE AMBASSADOR TO FOREIGN MINISTER PEACOCK,
PUTTING THE MATTER IN PERSPECTIVE AND STATING THAT:

(1) WE DO NOT REGARD THE SUBSTITUTIO OF A NEW PIECE
OF MACHINERY FOR AN OLD PIECE OF MACHINERY WITHOUT ANY
CHANGE IN THE FUNCTION IN THE CHANGE OF THE PIECE OF
MACHINERY TO BE A MATTER THAT REQUIRES FORMAL CONSULTATION
AT THE GOVERNMENT-TO-GOVERNMENT LEVEL; (2) WE
CONSIDER THAT TECHNICAL WORKING LEVEL EXCHANGES BETWEEN
THE US COMMANDER, HIS AUSTRALIAN DEPUTY COMMANDER, AND
THE INTERGRATED STAFF AT NORTH WEST CAPE ABOUT DAY-TO-DAY
OPERATIONS ARE SATISFACTORY; AND (3) POINTING OUT THAT,
AS A PRACTICAL MATTER, IT WOULD BE VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE
FOR THE TWO GOVERNMENTS TO CONSULT AT THE POLICY LEVEL REPEAT
AT THE POLICY LEVEL ABOUT THE INCREDIBLE NUMBER OF WORKING
LEVEL DETAILS, BUDGETING, FORWARD PLANNING, ETC., THAT GO ON
ALL THROUGH THE YEAR IN THE THOUSANDS OF DIFFERENT GOVERNMENT
OFFICES. WE QUESTION WHETHER THAT'S WHAT THE GOA REALLY
HAS IN MIND, AND WE QUESTION WHETHER TRYING TO DO SO WOULD
REALLY SERVE THE "POLICY LEVEL".
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